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[For the religious functions of the dabtara in the Ethiopian church, see category 793.]

282 over the "alga" bedstead.

Sheepskins ("debdeb") are used as upholstery over the solid clay bench that runs along the inside of the Amhara hut, as cover for the children at night, or to protect a mule from chafing by placing the sheepskin under
[291] the saddle. Other sheepskins, "agoza" or "dabälo", are worn by church students too poor to own a good toga. Several skins make a coat for an adult itinerant monk and, formerly, for the warriors.

[345] Goatskins, when little-worked, are used for water carrying ("qärbäta") on travel, or to store butter in.
[212] The bladder is made into a little bag. But goatskins carefully and at length scraped and tanned are made into parchment for amulets and books, especially psalteries for the church. These yellow-brown parchments ("beranna") with religious or warrior-king texts were rolled into a goatskin cover. Since contact with European missionaries in the mid-19th century, the custom has been to sew parchment pages together on one side with a twisted gut, bind the book in this fashion within two wooden covers covered with a fed, tanned goatskin, on which a cross with even branches is impressed with a hot iron.

[531] In the same fashion scabbards of daggers are covered and ornamented with impressed, geometric lines. The tanned tailskin of a cow is used to cover a better walk-
[534] ing stick, on which it gradually dries fast. Drums for use in church (and formerly for royal proclamations) are made by tanned cowskins stretched over both ends of the wooden body. Finely tanned skins are used to cover the

643 Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1931 and 1955.

His "Solomonic Dynasty" claims descent from the Biblical Queen of Sheba, known to Abyssinian tradition as "Makeda", or "Azeb", and her son, Menelik I. The proper reference to the emperor is "Atse", to the empress, "Itēgē" (lit. Master, Mistress, i.e., of the country), used before the name. If no name follows the designation, the title "jan" is used (possibly from the Geez "dāyyānā", he judges, or from the Cushitic "zehon", elephant, king of beasts). In address, the appelation used for the emperor is "Germawi hoy!" (Oh, Magnificence), formerly "Jan hoy!" (Oh, Elephant).

645 The Council of Elders, "chelot", referred to in village and town, also applies to the Crown Council of State. It consists, in addition to the emperor, of the Abuna, the archbishop of the State; those "ras" who have survived the centralization of recent years, notably the conservative kinsman of the emperor, Ras Kassa, and his liberal kinsman, Ras Imru; the powerful, reputedly chauvinistic, Minister of the Pen, Wolds Giyorgis; and several cabinet Ministers included more for decoration than expected contributions. Next to the emperor himself, this is the highest policy-making body at present, dominating, on important issues, the legislative, judicial and executive framework of the bicameral Parliament and cabinet. Serious problems discussed in the Crown Council have ranged from disaffection in high places, to the question of whether or not the old Geez-Amharic alphabet of 276 and more syllables should be simplified

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●212 to facilitate the teaching of Amharic to non-Amharic Ethiopians, illiterates, and for typing.

642 779 This latter change has not been made largely because of theopposition of the Abyssinian church. The Emperor is officially "Defender of the Faith". His connection with the church follows Old Testament patterns during the reigns of David and Solomon. The "tabot " (ark), which Emperor Menelik I supposedly spirited away from the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem to its secret place at Aksum, is regarded as guarding the liberty of the countryto this day. Church and State are thus intimately connected, and when Mussolini threatened Ethiopia, the Emperor and his chieftains swore to defend the "tabot" with their lives. After liberation, the Coptic Abyssinian church was reaffirmed as the State church, though weakened in its temporal powers(esp. feudal land tenure). When the last link with Alexandria was severed a few years ago, the Abyssinian church became fully the established state church.

173 The traditional epic of the "Solomonic Dynasty", the book "Käbrä Nägäst", is still honored officially, and taken literally by the people. It contains an extension of the Biblical story of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to the court of King Solomon, and claims she conceived a son, Menelik I, the first Abyssinian ruler of the Solomonic Dynasty. The book may possibly date from the 13th century, justifying the resumption of this dynasty.

872 Maryam", "Malka Iyasus". All of these are basic devotion-
[538] al liturgy.

●[212] It is noteworthy that there is usually no formal training in writing at all, for fear of misuse. Individual students can take the initiative of finding a private tutor for writing.

At this point the local schooling ended, usually after about three years. In the past, only church students travelling to canters of learning went beyond that level. Only they learned to understand what they were reading.

874 On this higher level, church students read Geez
538 literature such as Miracles, Lives of Saints, "Gädel", "Tamarä Maryam", "Gänzät", "Mar Yes-haq", and Ethics, "sirak". Also church homilies, "dersan", containing doctrine, "dersät", composed by a saintly author, "Därasi". Important is the book "bal abäw" a combination of homilies of Greek, Coptic, and Syrian church Fathers, probably translated from Arabic to Geez in the mid-15th century under Emperor Zara Yaqob.

874 Those proceeding still further divided into specializations (sort of electives). Some specialized in devotional poetry, including compositions, for about 3 years--"qeñe". Others specialized in "zēma", for which they had to be talented with a musical ear to distinguish the musical notation of "degwa", "somä degwa", "me'raf", "mäwasat", "zenmarē qeddasē sāatat". Still others specialized for a minimum of three years in religious philo-

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara.MP5

779 659 the nation in western patterns.

(1) The use of the church in promoting Amhara-
[721] dominated Ethiopian nationalism. This was recognized and promoted by Emperor Menelik II who had priests carry the "tabot" into newly conquered Galla, Sidamo and other pa-
[566] gan and semi-Muslim areas of his new empire, giving his military conquests the character of a crusade. Churches were built in these areas, guarded by troops of occupation, made permanent by feudal grants under which the local population, made "gabbar" serfs, was permitted to remain on the land as sharecroppers and peons of the feudal church.

This use of the church has been continued, though with reduced feudal emphasis, by the present emperor.
● [212] The Geez alphabet of the church, modified in Amharic usage, is the only alphabet even non-Amharic-speakers may use, if they wish to write their languages, particularly in
[643] print. By taking on the name "Haile Selassye" (Power of the Trinity), upon coronation, the present emperor re-emphasized the power of the church. Finally, on November 4th 1955, when the new liberalized Constitution of 131 articles was proclaimed, it reaffirmed that the Ethiopian "Orthodox" Church, founded in the 4th century on the doctrines of St. Mark, is the established church of the state.

659 178 Phase (2), begun by the present emperor as his power increased, was a concurrent weakening of the temporal power of the church. At first this was gradual. In

prevail.

Most elementary school graduates from the provincial capitals do not continue to Addis Ababa for a high school education, for they can obtain good and honorable positions, paying ETH$125.- (US $50.-) per month in the same town, as teachers, municipal clerks, with a good chance to be appointed to judgeship soon if they cultivate the right persons in power with "daj temat". Even Students who "flunk out" in the 7th or 8th grade can earn ETH$100.- as teachers of lower grades, or as low-grade clerks.

One old tradition which has broken down in the modern elementary schools but not in most church schools, is the prohibition of extra-curricular writing. In the higher church grades, in which students' piety was already confirmed, especially in the monastery schools, copying psalms, gospels, (and by extension, government documents), was permitted, practiced, even regarded as praiseworthy. But there was, and in rural areas still is, fear that less pious students would use their knowledge of writing to experiment with magical formulae, doodlings, etc., creating dangerous mischief.

Therefore, parchment goatskins and writing equipment were carefully kept away from students of village church schools, and they were not taught to write. Thus, achievement of the skill of a scribe, "dabtara", required considerable individual initiative and study away from home.

However, boys at the "experimental" age of childhood, would amuse themselves with the forbidden game of writing and doodling in secret, and they still do. Their work can be seen scribbled even on the outside walls and posts of some churches, a daring prank, sometimes in imitation of the church painter. More often

212 boys playing in the bush write on broad leaves; or on the sun-
857 bleached shoulder blades of dead oxen or donkeys cleaned up by hyenas, vultures and ants; or even scratch letters on their own dark skins with a thorn, preferably on the underside of the arm where it can be hidden more effectively. Sometimes rocks, charcoal and iron scrap provided tools or background for writing experiments.

Boys are very proud of this achievement, and tease illiterates, particularly shepherds who have not attended school, by writing or
[524] speaking phrases of Geez. Sometimes schoolboys use riddles, which they have memorized in school to memorize arithmetic, such as:

"(Question) What is two?
(Reply) Udder of female donkey;
(Question) What is four?
(Reply) Udder of cow."

[198] In reply to this teasing, illiterate shepherd boys make up "secret languages" of their own, by interlacing letters between syllables and speaking rapidly (much as zar doctors in the zar cult).

3. The Age of Obedience: Adolescence.

882 The age of experimentation, in which liberties taken by youngsters are often condoned, comes to an end as soon as puberty is reached. Parental authority, particularly that of the father, is more frequent and intense over the activities of the adolescent than over the peer-group child. The sexes are more sharply divided, no longer engage in experimental play activities in groups, and the patterns of flirting become more culturally structured, less random, and more personal. The adolescents are made to feel more "rule" conscious. With the awkwardness of adolescence comes a sudden shyness,

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

PART V : INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

156 Social stratification and kinship relations dominate interpersonal relations in Amhara society, and, though they put their stamp also on segments of the Amhara cultural pattern, they do not limit the corresponding artistic expression as much as one might expect. Thus, while Amhara artistic expression shares much of the "formality" of the rest of the culture, it evidences considerable potentialities for individual initiative, particularly in non-material expression such as games of intellect.

538 Material culture has not been much developed among the Amhara; artistic expression also has many of the usual characteristics of a ●[2]12 non-literate society, since literacy has traditionally been limited to a small minority of the population. This has led both to a reinforcement of formality in literature, and to a playfulness in oral artistic expression which remained unfettered.

1. Communication and Interpersonal Relations.

203 Communication "by grapevine" is still the major method of dissemination of news, rumor, and entertainment. Feudal lords in the past would even make use of "musical signatures" which identified the sender: to prove that a message was actually sent by the sender, the messenger was taught a secret musical note like a code, which identified the master. There was considerable suspicion about interference with 212 203 messages by enemies, who might alter them, so that, when messages were written, the scribe was careful not to leave a margin at the bottom, lest an enemy intercepting the message might add harmful statements falsely reflecting on the sender (e.g. his loyalty). Since most writing was done by formal, professional scribes, and Geez square writing was used, handwriting was not considered sufficient safeguard for identification. This pattern of leaving no margin persists to this day.

203 Transportation of messages, until the recent installment of telegraph, was by messenger, and still is to a considerable extent. In the past, the king or governor would send an official messenger, ("melekt ʾätta") with the message wedged tightly in a cleft stick carried above the head while running, which assured safety to the runner.

Proclamation of decrees was and sometimes still is drummed out at the public market place, and only in the capital are public radio loudspeakers utilized. These decrees are heard in respectful silence, though unpopular decrees might, among Amhara, be followed by a delayed "murmuring", which, in the past, often led to local rebellions. Spies [208] of the government listen on such occasions to learn public opinion (astäyayät") in time.

211 Landmarks "for memory" are encountered frequently, and they partly take the place of inscribed monuments of cultures of greater literacy. Commemorative monuments in the countryside, called "mäsalänïya", take the form of conical piles of rocks, to which passersby add small rocks, so that one grows sometimes until no one remembers what the original event was. It may have been a battle, or the resting place of a saint. There are no name inscriptions, this being sometimes purposely avoided to prevent an evil spirit such as buda from fastening onto the name and doing harm.

212 To insure precision of communication in matters of culture focus, e.g. in religious communication, a combination of pictures and written words is used. This has developed the ancient comic-strip-type of illustration of religious scenes, mainly biblical, hagiological, and Abyssinian-National, found in canvas paintings on the walls of churches. The words spoken by the character are written into the empty space near the mouth. The scenery is starkly realistic. The style shows fierce concentration on the event depicted, without irrelevent background scenery; naivete, but body positions shown with realistic gusto.

212 Communication among the Amhara can be said to be formal on all
195 matters of culture focus. Writing is regarded by the Amhara as relegated to formal use, and schoolboys were penalized for experimenting with it informally. Language, however, being oral and thus less controllable, compensates for this; and artistic expression and experimentation make free and often playful and inventive use of the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical raw material of language.

A. The Raw Material of the Amharic Language Put to Use.

a) Historical Development

197 Much of the lexical matter and most of the grammar of the Amharic language, also the basis of the alphabet that it uses, are derived from Geez, one of the South Arabian languages of about 500 B.C. The term "Läsana Geez" the language of the Geez, has, among Abyssinians, the connotation of "language of the free men", i.e. conquerors. Linguistic scholars have raised the question whether one single language, Geez, was imported from Southern Arabia about that time, or whether different, possibly related, languages came from there via separate channels at different times. The latter theory seems more likely, and Amharic may owe the Semitic part of its character to a sister language of Geez, rather than to Geez itself (footnote 85). But the Amhara firmly believe in the derivation from Geez itself - and directly.

197 Whether directly or indirectly derived originally, certain it is
192 that for many centuries and quite consciously even today, the Amhara have been borrowing freely and proudly from the Geez language any term useful particularly to express abstract concepts, in which Amharic is

Footnote 85 - Theory of Professor Marcel Cohen, quoted by Leslau Archaic Features in South Ethiopia. (See Bibliography).

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

197 sometimes poor, but Geez very rich. In fact, linguistic purists among
192 modern-nationalistic educated Amharas, urge rejection of foreign loan-words in favor of continued and even revived borrowing from Geez cognates.

212 The Amharic script, largely derived from ancient Sabean characters, is, unlike other Semitic scripts, written from left to right. The characters are syllabic, based on 26 consonants from Geez, plus 4 labiovelar diphthongs, plus 7 additional consonants added in Amharic and called "yäärab fidäl" (lit. the Arabic alphabet). These 37 consonants in Amharic are always written in syllabic form, combined with one of 7 vowal orders, so that students must learn a syllabic alphabet of 259 characters. There are also 20 symbols for numerals, which are still taught, and even printed in the modern press, and not replaced by the simpler Arabic numerals; though the latter have been recently taught. These characters and numerals are now printed on a sheet that also includes the Gospel of St. John, in Geez, and a photograph of Emperor Haile Selassie; pasted on a cardboard, this sheet is now carried to school by the young students.

197 Amharic also derives a considerable part of its raw material from
192 Cushitic languages spoken in Ethiopia prior to (and after) the Semitic colonization, perhaps more so than any other Abyssinian language (footnote 86). From these Cushitic sources Amharic obtains part of its vocabulary (especially most of its terms relating to concrete matters),

Footnote 86 - Leslau: Southeast Semitic
Leslau: Observations on Gurage Documents
Leslau: Review of Cohen's Nouvelles Etudes d'Ethiopien Meridional
Cohen, M.: Traité de la Langue Amharique
Houghton: Aspects of Amharic

193 (E.g. instead of "the man who came", Amharic constructs the sentence "who came the man".)

212 . Orthography shows considerable ambivalence of choice, perhaps due to the later influences of Arabic and to the Amharic additions to the Geez alphabet. Thus, interchanges of "q" and "g", "t" and "t", "m" and "n" are common among consonants; "ä" and "i"; "e" and "e" and "a" somewhat less commonly exchanged among vowels. This confuses the root, vowel and tense indications for the foreigner, and even Amharic-speakers when discussing a matter not commonly discussed, may misunderstand each other because of these interchanges, especially if they come from different regions.

c) Regional Variations.

197 Part of the wide variety of regional linguistic differences among Amharic-speakers is due to the long, conservative, provincial semi-isolation. Some of this is not much different from provincialisms in rural Europe; so that the pronounciation of even common words such as "aydällăm" (he isn't here) identifies the Amhara from Shoa, "aydällăm" from Begemdir province (Gondar). But a much greater part of the regional differences is due to the fact that for many centuries, perhaps millenia, the Amharic speakers of Begemdir (Gondar) and Gojjam provinces have been exposed to "old-Cushitic" languages such as Agau, while the Amhara of Shoa province has been exposed to "new-Cushitic" languages such as Galla.

The Abyssinian of Tigre province, whose "Tigre" or "Tigrinya" language may be a closer derivative of Geez than Amharic, has long maintained Semitic ties through continued influence of developing Arabic from Yemen and the Red Sea, and has in turn affected the inland Amharic of Semyen-Begemdir, whose people shared Abyssinian religion and culture. Western Amharas, e.g. in Gojjam province, but also in the trading center of Gondar, have been affected by vulgate Arabic spoken

643 Addis Ababa. He has repeatedly urged the Abyssinian clergy to
178 take up the practice of preaching in church, on such subjects as
779 reduction of the violent mourning for the dead and the ruinous "tazkar" memorial feasts; and admission of women into the church building. In Addis Ababa, a few modern-style churches have agreed to do this out of respect for his presence. But the provincial churches have retained their sacerdotal character and have not, except on occasions of brief imperial visits, adopted these innovations. The clergy has also resisted (by means of the "inertia" previously described) the urgings of the emperor to convert masses
[797] of the "lower" ethnic groups to Coptic Abyssinian Christianity. Only sporadically have small-scale conversions taken place. The emperor seems to recognize the value of expanding the nominal State Religion, Coptic Abyssinian Christianity, to a real national church, as a pillar of national solidarity and national loyalty.

178 The new élite, small in number, but actively supporting the
●212 emperor's policies, and even occasionally beginning to become impatient with the circumspection and quiet, indirect, subtlety of Emperor Haile Selassie, has for some years raised the issue of the simplification of the Amhara alphabet. They had assumed that there would be much less opposition to such a worthwhile change than to big issues like abolition of the "gabbar" and changes in land tenure. The present alphabet, which consists of 259 syllables composed of 37 consonants and a minimum of 7 vowels, makes it difficult to teach writing to illiterate adults, children, and non-Amharic speakers, or to design typewriters. But the new, young, modern elite could not have been more mistaken in their optimism. The matter became a cause celebre, despite the fact that the proposal, published in 1948 in an Amharic booklet "Reform of the Alphabet",

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

178 and signed modestly and anonymously "The Friends of Knowledge",
212 had been published under the auspices of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education. It had been authored by the Amhara (modern-minded) noble, Ras Imru (later ambassador to the USA), the Amhara historian-grammarian Blatta Marze Hazen, and a Western scholar affiliated with the American National Council of Churches of Christ.

The conflict arose largely from the fact that most Amharic letters are directly derived from the old Geez, considered sacred because church liturgy and literature are written in it. Therefore, the Abyssinian church rejected the idea of alphabet reform as sacrilegeous. The emperor decided to postpone action indefinitely. (footnote 139).

178 563 It is this opposition, concentrated in the old Amhara nobility and clergy that has given opportunity to the loyal Galla to affiliate themselves more closely with the central government. Their modern-educated sons serve in high positions in the imperial bodyguard, army, and provincial administration. By affiliating themselves with the central government, the Galla obtain protection against the exploiting rural Amhara gentry. From the point of view of the modern central government such loyal support is greatly needed. From the point of view of the provincial, traditional Amhara, however, every young modern official sent from Addis Ababa, is now nicknamed "Galla", even if he is an Amhara.

181 178 Meanwhile the new elite has itself developed an indirect means to introduce a new value complex, at least in Addis Ababa. This is called "seltaney", which formerly meant politeness, refined and re-

Footnote 139: Leslau, Wolf: La Réforme de l'Alphabet Éthiopien. (in) Rassegna di Studi Etiopici, vol.12,1953,pp.96-106. Rome.

2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5

of Semitic blood. There is rather more of the Semite in the Tigraian and the Amhara than in the Shoan and the Gojjami. The Tigraian language has come much under Semitic influences, and there are many common elements in Amharic and Arabic: not only in vocabulary but also in syntax. The Amharic alphabet, with over two hundred and fifty odd letters, is a very exact instrument for rendering the language. It is derived from one of the old Semitic alphabets of the Middle East. Amharic has many explosive sounds which often give the impression that the speaker is excited and indignant when he is not, and with the impatient foreigner this can sometimes lead to misunderstandings.

Physically the Amhara is slight and light-boned with regular rather delicate features. He has quick almost bird-like movements and his manner gives the impression which I cannot describe better than by the word fluttering. The hair and beard has the characteristic Hamitic corrugation. Men often go iron grey in middle life, but seldom white. The hair of the women is artificially frizzed and dressed with butter-grease to fix it. This gives them a gollywog appearance.

The Amhara have the most charming manners and they like to stand on ceremony. They have a complicated social hierarchy and always dismount as a salutation to superior persons. They will also touch with their lips the hands or knees of superiors. At the same time they have the naturally easy and democratic outlook of the East; and the poorest man will expect attention and the right of access to a Ras, or even to the Emperor. The approaches to the palace at Addis Ababa were lined with sometimes quite humble people, farmers and soldiers, waiting an opportunity to secure the Emperor's decision on some matter.

To respond to his ceremonial manners is an easy way to the heart of the Ethiopian. At the same time they are quick to take offence and their shrill voices are soon raised in anger.

The frail physique and mercurial temperament of the Amhara is doubtless the result of the rarefied alpine atmosphere and of a diet predominantly of grain paste seasoned with strong condiments—which they vary from time to time with orgies on practically raw meat. But fragile as they look, the Amhara are, nevertheless, extremely hardy. They will sleep out in all weathers with nothing to cover them but their thin cotton robes; they are remarkable runners and can maintain a jog trot all day; they are like goats on the hillside.

I believe the Amhara to be naturally intelligent with a brain which only awaits proper training and development. During the five years of the Italian occupation, no small proportion of the population of Addis Ababa acquired a fair knowledge of Italian. I knew a boy of twenty who, in addition to excellent English, was proficient in Arabic, Somali, Galla, and Swahili. He came, of course, from Harar, which is a great metropolis for peoples from all round the Red Sea. Abyssinian recruits acquired a knowledge of Morse with remarkable facility.

When it is possible to overcome the linguistic difficulty and get on friendly terms with Ethiopians, they prove delightful companions, naturally kind, generous and friendly, with a charming sense of humour and often a nice

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
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346 is painted, it is not certain whether it is stone or wood. It has two sets of cloisters round the body of the church, both
346 covered in, and much painted with figures of apostles,
532 patriarchs, prophets, and many things of the Old Law, and
353 many angels, and St. George on horseback, who is in all the churches. This monastery also possesses a great cloth, like a piece of tapestry, on which is the crucifix and effigy of Our Lady and the apostles, and other figures of patriarchs and prophets, and each one has his Latin name written, so that no man of the country made it. It has many small and ancient pictures, not well made, and they are not upon the altars, for it is not their custom: they keep them in a
[212] sacristy, mixed up with many books, and they bring them out on feast days. There is in this monastery a very large kitchen and bakehouse, also a very large refectory, in which
792 they eat. They mostly eat three and three[1] in a large dish,
262 it is not deep, but flat like a tray, and their food is very
[264] poor. The bread is of maize and barley, and other grain which they call *taffo*,[2] a small black grain. They make this bread round, and of the size and roundness of a citron,[3] and they give three of these to each friar: to the novices they give three loaves to two of them, it is a matter of amazement how they can maintain themselves. They also give them a few vegetables, without salt or oil. Of this food they send to a great many old pensioners, who do not come to the refectory. Besides seeing these things when we
792 buried Matthæus, I saw them many times, because I came there to pass time with the friars, principally on feast days, when we were near there. In this way I learned about them and their property, and revenues and customs. In my opinion there were generally always a hundred friars in this

[1] By threes.

[2] Mansfield Parkins calls it teff, the species of corn most esteemed in this country.

[3] Zamboa, not referred to in Selves' translation.

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
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164 There are many lepers in this country, and they do not live separated from the people, they live all together; there are many people who, out of their devotion, wash them, and tend their sores with their hands.

231 There is a great quantity of honey in all the country, and the bees are not in hives, but inside the houses, where the cultivators live, clinging to the walls on the inside, where they have a mode of egress outside, and also inside they surround the house: but they do not on this account desist from dwelling in the house, because the bees go outside. There are a great number of these swarms of bees, chiefly in the monasteries, there are also many in the woods and mountains, and the men put hives near the trees and fill them with bees, and bring them in them to the houses.

346 Since no one sits in the churches, at their doors outside of them, and within the circuit, there are always a great quantity of staves with cross pieces like a .....[1] or cripple's crutch, and each one takes his staff and leans upon it as long as he is at the offices of the church. In the churches there are many effigies painted on the walls. Effigies of [532] our Lord and our Lady, and of the apostles and patriarchs, and prophets and angels, and in all the churches St. George. They have not got solid images. There are many books in [212] [191] the churches all written on parchment, because there is no paper there, and the writing and language is Tigray,[2] which is that of the first country in which Christianity began.

In this country they are not accustomed to write to one another, neither do the officers of justice write anything. All the justice that is done, and what is ordered, is by messengers and speech. I say only that I saw the property of Prester John written down on being delivered up and received.

554 There would be much fruit and much more tillage in the country, if the great men did not ill treat the people, for

[1] *Talu.* [2] *Tigia.*

191 ETHIOPIAN FOLKTALES ASCRIBED TO THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY AMHARA WIT, ALÄQA GÄBRE-HANNA:—Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia today, is gradually be-
● 212 coming the *lingua franca* of the empire. Until recently it was spoken mainly on the fertile
538 highland plateau of central and northwestern Ethiopia, in part of what was formerly known as Abyssinia. Predominantly Coptic Christian, the Amhara people have sacred writings in Ge'ez, old Ethiopic. Amharic has adapted this ancient script to its own use. The folklore of the Amhara is mainly oral (except for religious texts) and represents a crosscurrent of Mid-
[565] dle Eastern and African cultures. Traditionally, Amhara society was one of priests, feudal lords, and peasants. Lower on the social scale were non-Coptic ethnic groups who performed such important economic functions as ironsmithing and pottery-making.

538 This is reflected in the folklore. On non-religious, everyday subjects, the wit of the Am-
522 hara is peasant-like, earthy, full of tales of Rabelaisian appetites and sly solutions to human
193 problems. The Amharic language lends itself readily to puns and hidden meanings, since many verbs can have double or triple interpretations due to the hidden variations in the basic verbal stem and the absence or presence of gemination of some consonants. The listener must pay close attention. If he misinterprets the context and fails to discern the pun, he is often made the butt of the next tricky joke by those who have heard it before. The more a storyteller and wit masters the *sowaso* 'grammar' of the Amharic language, the better he can manipulate this humor.

538 A master of this art was *Aläqa* 'Chief' (an honorary title) Gäbre-Hanna, a contem-
159 porary of Emperor Menelik just before the end of the nineteenth century. As far as is known, he never put into writing any of his stories, witticisms, linguistic gymnastics, and philosophical puns. But to this day the peasants and even the nobles remember his stories well and tell them so often that a number of versions have developed.

He was a native of Gondar and had all the provincial pride of the "Gondarey" in the one-time greatness of this town and district that is now back country. He lived at the time the present capital, Addis Ababa, was being built and the King of Shoa had become Emperor of Abyssinia. Like many another "Gondarey," Aläqa Gäbre-Hanna pretended to disdain the newfangled importations of Emperor Menelik and the growing employment of subjugated Galla tribal chiefs at the imperial court. Jokingly, he took the liberty of referring to the Emperor's home province, Shoa, as "that Galla province." (Even today much
[191] Galliña is spoken there, a result of the sixteenth century conquest of the area by Galla tribes.) No one else would have dared such a remark, but he was popular with Emperor Menelik and especially with the Empress Taitu, and could tell them certain frank truths and tease them with irony in a semi-polite manner. However, he was not a court jester.

8: Rey G.-5 (1910-1920)1935
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[pp. 1-57 have been omitted from the files,- Analyst]

CHAPTER IV

SOME OF THEIR HABITS AND CUSTOMS

197 REFERENCE has already been made to the number of languages spoken in the country. Of these, the principal is Amharic, and of the Semitic languages of the world it is, according to Mr Armbruster, spoken by a greater number of people than any other, with the
● 212 exception of Arabic. Its difficulty may be gauged by the fact that there are over two hundred letters in the alphabet, and consequently the number of guides to the language guaranteed to teach it in half a dozen lessons by correspondence is limited.

I am bound to say, however, in mitigation of this apparently insurmountable barrier to learning Amharic, that these characters represent syllables and not letters, and are variations of about thirty-seven root characters.

197 The next most important language is Galla, a Hamitic tongue which is spoken and understood by all the different branches of Galla throughout the various districts inhabited by them; in addition Tigré is spoken in Eritrea, and Tigréin in the province of Tigré; both of these are Semitic languages, as is also the ancient Geze or Geuze tongue, which is to the Abyssinians much as Latin was to the English people in the Middle Ages.

805 But if their language is difficult their calendar is simpler than ours, for instead of having months of differing lengths, they divide the year into twelve

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

priests and monks celebrated mass and prayed in every direction. But the ritualistic and ascetic aspects of Ethiopian Christianity did not monopolize the attention of Gondar, for they were balanced by the sensuous leisure that prevailed in the city. Gondar could be, as European travelers found it before the middle of the nineteenth century, "a town of pleasures" and of "boundless debauchery."[43]

A preoccupation with the symbols of the religious tradition, however, was quite consistent with a less than puritanical atmosphere. This—the work of teachers, students, painters, copyists—represented the genius of Gondar's cultural activity. Generation after generation traversed the mountainous highlands to reach this mecca of learning. Painters were drawn or formed there in such numbers that a special section of the city, the "picture market," was reserved for the sale of parchment and pigments. Under such circumstances the prestige of the literatus was bound to affect the common culture.

Gondarēs have traditionally been eager to send their children to the church schools. An unusually high percentage of people is said to have learned to read the *Dāwit* (Psalms of David, the final step in the traditional elementary curriculum) in and around Gondar than in any other part of Ethiopia. The Gondarēs have been notoriously proud of their literary and general cultural level. Indeed, they claim to speak the purest and most elegant Amharic in the land. The stability and number of Gondar's religious institutions permitted religious culture to flourish there. This gave the Gondarē occasion to become especially proficient in the religio-literary virtues as they were defined in Amhara culture.

Manz versus Gondar

As church and army were among the chief institutional developments of Abyssinia, so religious culture and military culture were among the chief products of the Amhara-Tigre spirit. Both aspects of its culture were important all over Abyssinia throughout its history, but in Gondar and Manz, respectively, they underwent a more specialized development.

Gondar grew as a center for religious culture because the materials necessary for such a growth were concentrated in one place over a long period of time. The abundance of churches, masters, and pupils created a dense climate in which religious dance, painting, poetry, and textual studies flourished. Such innovation as the traditions permitted was encouraged by the coming of clergy to Gondar from all parts of the country.

The city failed as a military and political center because only a mobile capital could control the distant regions of Ethiopia and because, as Trimingham observes, "a fixed capital enabled court intrigue to thrive more insidiously [so that] coups d'état and the killing or imprisoning of monarchs became the rule."[44] Gondar's political integrity was weakened, moreover, by the in-

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

garded as more important than human effort in attaining one's goals. "If a man works hard, he may remain poor. If he does not work hard, he may become wealthy. The outcome is due to fate." The peasant is discouraged from determined efforts to make changes in his environment because of the feeling that no matter what he does, God's disposition is what really counts.

In addition to feeling that innovation is ineffectual, the Amhara peasant tends to feel that it is immoral. Reverence for fathers and forefathers is, we observed, a key element of the Amhara ethos. This patriarchal sentiment informs the Amhara's defense not only of his land and his religion, but of the procedures of daily living as well. It is not good to deviate from the familiar ways of doing things because they, too, have been handed down by "our fathers"; this is a phrase which interlards Amharic conversation.

A number of other, more specific, norms have had the effect of discouraging inventiveness among the Amhara. Experimentation with matter was inhibited by the disdain for puttering about with one's hands—doing anything, that is, similar to the activities of the socially dejected artisans and slaves. Hence the peasant retains the same rudimentary tools for wresting a subsistence from nature that he has used for millennia, and searches about the woods for a properly shaped piece of wood rather than improve his art of carpentry.[16] Experimentation with ideas was inhibited by the anti-intellectual cast of Amhara culture, which discredits the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. Ideas pertain either to the unchangeable mysteries, as expressed in the religious literature, or to the unchanging verities of human experience, as expressed in folk proverbs. Ideas are not entertained as "adventure," to use Whitehead's term—as a source of novel possibilities in life, a guide rather than a justification of custom.

Two factors are especially significant in accounting for the Amhara peasant's reluctance to use ideas drawn from experience and insight for the purpose of reshaping custom. One is the fact that the primary medium for the elaboration and dissemination of such ideas—the written word—was affected by a number of restrictions in Amhara culture.[17]* As a consequence, although writing has been known in Abyssinia for two millennia, it had almost never

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* The act of writing was considered to be inherently shameful: like any manual activity other than farming and fighting, writing was regarded as degrading work, the business of scribes whose status was thereby not much higher than that of potters and metalsmiths. Only a small percentage of the clergy learned to write, and those who did were rarely adept at it. The products of writing, moreover, were deemed either too sacred or too nefarious to warrant giving laymen easy access to their medium. Script belonged above all else to the realm of scripture. The awe felt for holy writs was a deterrent against using that medium for other than devotional purposes. The chief private use of writing was for the magic formulas of the *dabtarā*, another connection with the supernatural that discouraged its lay practice. The *dabtarā*'s art served injurious as well as beneficent purposes, and the fear that those who learned to write might stumble onto potent phrases was reason for restricting that skill to a small group of the initiated.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

*565 121 178 181 • [212] [577] been employed as a medium for promulgating new ideas or discussing contemporary problems. Another feature of Amhara culture that helps to account for the mental inertia of the peasantry is its emphasis on the value of deference and obedience to authority. The Amhara typically rely on legitimate authority figures to define appropriate responses to new situations, and regard the delegation of powers as a diminution of the status of such authorities. The peasant has thus refrained from initiating changes in the public domain because the prerogative of taking initiative is generally reserved to ecclesiastical and political authorities.

*565 121 177 178 *Receptivity to Change*

Consideration of the peasant's readiness to follow the lead of legitimate authorities already points to an inadequacy of the second stereotype we have mentioned: that which sees the peasant as hopelessly ignorant and backward, hence intractable from the viewpoint of a program of modernization. For while the Amhara peasant is likely to resist the efforts of some unknown official from Addis Ababa to introduce change in his local environment, he does tend to follow the directives and imitate the example of the local authorities whom he knows and who shape the course of decisions and sanctions at the [137] local level. Thus it is, for example, that the eucalyptus tree—imported by Emperor Menelik, taken to the provinces by nobles, and eventually planted by individual peasants—has come to dot the Amhara countryside. How quickly such change can take place is shown by the recent acceptance of photography in many provincial regions. In 1950, peasants in many Amhara areas strenuously objected to having their pictures taken, in part at least for fear of the camera as bearer of the evil eye. By 1960, visitors to some of these same areas were being deluged with requests for photographs. In the interim these peasants had been exposed to numerous photographs of the Emperor and high government officials and had observed their local authorities seizing every chance they could to be photographed.

Yet it is clear that the Amhara peasant will not imitate everything that is accepted by his traditional authorities. When a new custom strikes him as too outlandish his resistance can become adamant, as was abundantly demonstrated when the court of Susneyos carried out its ill-fated conversion to Catholicism. In analyzing the peasant's receptivity to change it is important to distinguish as independent variables: (1) the degree of acceptability of the *agents* of change, and (2) the extent to which the proposed change is congruent with traditional beliefs and values.

The whole question of the nature of peasant opposition and receptivity to modernizing programs may be discussed most realistically by focusing on [744] a concrete area of attempted change. The material I have assembled is most detailed for the case of public health, an area to which the government has

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

The *dabtarā*'s way of life is more variable than that of the monk, his possibilities for income more diverse than those of the priest. He may be attached to a church as a chorister and receive a share of the church's revenues, as do the priests. Or he may donate his services to the church and earn his living by secular employment. He may work as a scribe at the court of a king or nobleman. He may spend most of his time teaching, gaining support from some large church or monastery. Like many priests he may cultivate land. In any case, he is likely to derive some income from the sale of amulets and from medical therapies. Some *dabtarā* are even said to have wandered about the country as hunters, performing magical services for clients as they go.

Dabtarā are not set off from the populace by special insignia. Some wind a turban around their heads, as do many priests; but others may dress like ordinary peasants. If holding more prestigious posts they may be seen with fly-whisks or wearing a *barnos*. But they are known by the people, who fear and respect them. They are feared because of their magical powers, which are believed capable of rendering bullets harmless and turning *ǐnjarā* to dust. They are respected because of their learning, for they are the only educated status group in traditional Amhara society. If the commoner's relatively impulsive *manner* of speaking is contrasted with the quiet reserve of the nobility, his relatively simple *language* is contrasted with that of the *dabtarā*, who is noted for a studied and circumspect use of language (*qāla-dabtarā*) and for larding his Amharic with literary (i.e., Ge'ez) expressions (*ya-dabtarā amārǐññā*).

In the case of the religious elite, then, status is in all cases achieved. While there is a natural tendency for sons of priests and *dabtarā* to follow their fathers' example, they arrive at the status in question only by fulfilling the same norms that are applied to the sons of laymen. These norms, however, differ among the different groups within the clergy. Investiture by an authority emanating from the seat of religious charisma, the Alexandrine Patriarchate, and the related ritual requirement of marriage with Communion, were the basis of priestly status, almost irrespective of the personal attainments of the candidate. Personal attainments were *all* that mattered, on the other hand, in the case of monk and *dabtarā*, but they differed radically for the two statuses.

The qualifications and characters of monks and *dabtarā* are almost diametrically opposed. The monastic state is entered only by means of a sacred rite; the *dabtarā* is in no way ordained, and might even be a "defrocked" priest. The monk's life is normally given to sensual renunciation; the *dabtarā* is normally an acknowledged sensualist (as appears, for example, in the proverb *ḳa-mesā ya-talaya dabtarā / yādargāl serā* ["a *dabtarā* who is kept from lunch / will work intrigues"][48] and in stories which celebrate the *dabtarā*'s use of his knowledge for private erotic ends). In the monk the virtue

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

than those necessary to perform their jobs. They do not attempt to maintain and build personal libraries, though there are a few exceptions to this. The three small bookstores in Addis Ababa offer only the most insubstantial fare.

Nor, finally, have more than a handful of private individuals taken upon themselves the charge of a scholarly or literary calling. Although Marcel Cohen heralded the birth of a printed literature in Amharic as early as 1925,[58] writing is still not very important on the Ethiopian scene.* The output of original books and pamphlets in Amharic averaged less than fifteen a year over the past two decades. The presses and bookstores distribute Amharic publications indifferently at best. Much of the literary impetus produced by the desire of many Ethiopians to write, and the obvious need for good writing that would address itself to the intellectual demands of the present generation, has been sapped by economic, political, and cultural factors.

The economic factors include the high cost of printing; the diminutive market; and the absence of publishing houses. If an author wants to be read, he must normally pay for publication himself. Those who cannot must either find a patron in the Crown—frequently a highly lucrative arrangement—or resort to mimeographic duplication, or else remain unpublished. The censorship system and anxiety about spontaneous expression of any sort which has been fostered by prevailing political conditions constitute additional obstacles to literary development.

The paucity of serious writing has been the result no less of prevailing cultural conditions. The low intellectual level of his potential audience, the absence of channels for criticism, and the dearth of precedent make it difficult for the Ethiopian writer to determine good standards of writing. The confused state of Amharic, owing to regional variations and the absence of consensus on neologisms and loan words for expressing modern concepts, poses many problems on the level of sheer vocabulary. The temptation to get into print quickly, if the financial and political barriers can be hurdled, exceeds the temptation to work long and hard on an opus of quality. The desire to pontificate frequently eclipses the quest for understanding.

Those conditions which have inhibited the growth of Amharic literature—poverty, governmental reluctance to provide sufficient freedom and support, the newness of the modernizing culture, and the motivational level of the intellectuals themselves—may be viewed more broadly as responsible for the relative barrenness of Ethiopian intellectual life as a whole. Insofar as these conditions change in the coming decades, a radical change in the quality and organization of Ethiopian intellectual life may be expected. As a sociological

* This is no longer due, however, to the negative attitude toward writing as such which was discussed in chapter iii. That traditional inhibition has been largely removed—primarily, it seems, by the postwar requirement that all legal accusations and court proceedings be set down in writing.

*755 *793 ensorcelling spells and rituals is mainly limited to certain debteras, the Coptic scholars among whom the *755 ganel's human intimates are also found. Since laymen 539 are generally illiterate and unfamiliar with the liturgical language (Ge'ez) in which spells are composed, they are unable to master the long lists of magical names and injunctions which are associated with powerful spells. Consequently, although laymen occasionally own ensorcelling spells and rituals, these spells are generally abbreviated and invariably weak. In addition, layowned spells and rituals are usually obtained from questionable sources, since the layman is unlikely to possess a medium appropriate for "purchasing" such knowledge.

*753 754 Human illness-causing powers may be inherited or congenital, as well as learned. In Begemder Province, inherited powers are limited to budas, Falasha wer-hyenas. The buda's dangerous abilities reach full potency after pubescence, when the hyenas' nocturnal cries compel him to spend the night with them feasting upon disinterred human cadavers. At dawn, the buda returns home, assuming a benign demeanor until his morbid attentions are [826] fixed upon a living victim. Many of these are persons [192] of "good blood" (tiruw dem sew), individuals who have inherited the light and unblemished complexion favored by Amhara, although other attractive physical features